

Hebrews 11:1

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Date: 26 July 1998

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[0:00] Let's turn again to Hebrews 11 and the opening words of the chapter. Hebrews 11 and verse 1. No faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.

These words contain what is close to definition of faith. And they bring out, I think, one fundamental point.

And that is that faith means being sure, it means being certain, it means being convinced. Faith we are told is being sure of what we hope for, it is being certain of what we do not see.

It doesn't mean that believers are always sure and certain. In fact, believers are very often not sure and not certain.

We go through times of doubt and times of great uncertainty. We may sometimes doubt if God loves us.

[1:31] We may sometimes doubt if the Bible is God's word. We may sometimes doubt if Christ rose from the dead. We may sometimes doubt if God exists. We know that sometimes all those believers who meet in God's own world Lops in God's own world Lops into a mood of doubt and uncertainty.

John the Baptist wants a word to Jesus, Are you he said the coming One or do we look for another? He had been so sure at one time that Jesus was the Messiah.

Messiah. But now we have his doubts. Was Jesus the coming one? David in the book of Psalms sometimes questions whether there is life after death. Sometimes great waves of despondency would perhaps overflow the soul and he would ask, well will we praise God in some kind of life beyond? Job doubted whether God loved him or God cared for him. And so it's entirely possible that those who are believers may go through times of doubt and sometimes times of very radical doubt and doesn't carries with it moods of great depression and uncertainty.

But that doesn't mean that faith itself doubts. A believer may doubt but belief does not doubt.

Belief is sure and belief is certain. And of course in our day it is unfashionable to have strong convictions or to have strong and undoubted faith. It is almost mandatory that if we are to up our respectable faith then there must somewhere be doubt, uncertainty, modesty and so on.

[4:03] But that's not how the Bible sees it. The Bible says that men and women are commended for being sure.

They are commended for being sure. They are commended for strength of conviction. That's what these words before us insistent on. Faith means being sure. And faith means being certain.

What is faith is certain about? And I think that from this passage two great points emerge.

One way is that faith is sure about the unseen. And the second way is that faith is sure about the future.

And I want to explore each of these for a moment. First of all, faith is sure about the unseen. In this world we are surrounded by what is visible. By things we can access with our senses.

[5:36] We can't see them and hear and touch and smell them. But faith knows that behind all those visibles there is the great world of the invisible. And faith is certain with regard to those invisibles.

And this great world of invisibles, it's invisible not because it is merely microscopic, because it is invisible because it is invisible because they are immaterial.

They have no mass. They have no velocity. They have no radiation. They emit no magnetic energy.

So, no human instrument and no human sense. And so, no human instrument and no human sense. Can ascertain their existence. Or plot their course. Or prove their reality.

So, no human being. They are not verifiable by the senses or by scientific experimentation.

For example, faith is sure with regard to God. Faith believes that God exists. Even though this God of existence is invisible. Even though our senses and instruments cannot have no access to. Faith is still sure. Saint Paul tells us that we are surrounded in this world by the revelation of God. That the visible things speak to us of the invisible. And that every human mind is so made that it invariably infers from the world around us that God exists. So that every human mind is sure of this eternal power and this eternal God. And in a way it's part of the Bible's great challenge to modern love.

[9:23] And once many years ago. A Russian cosmonaut came back from the world publicised this journey.

[illegible]

Of course, that whole argument is absurd. We don't find Shakespeare in Hamlet. We don't find Bill Gates inside one of his computers, one of his programs.

And beyond that there's this. Faith is sure too that God created this whole universe. You see then in verse 3, by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

We look into the vastness of space. We see these things. We look into atoms and molecules and subatomic particles and genes and chromosomes and still we are seen. It's all visible.

[12:52] Before those visible things, before those visible things, before those visible things began to be, what was there before the visible things?

Did all those visible things come from some other visible things? From something else that man could weigh and measure?

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[illegible]

And still I'm saying, he will reward those who seek him in the right place. And if we really are looking for his fellowship and help and deliverance, we can be sure.

Faith is sure about the future. It's sure, the writer says, of what we hope for. It's sure that God will fulfill all of his promises.

Because the future too is beyond verification. You can't conduct some experiment and say, this is what will happen in a thousand years' time.

[24:59] And yet, faith is sure about the future. It's sure about the unfulfilled promises of God.

Whatever such life exists. There was no sign of security. There was no geological evidence. There was no meteorological evidence.

And yet, Noah was told by God, this is going to happen. And Noah was absolutely sure.

He knew it was going to happen. And that's what he made those preparations. Or take the astonishing faith of Abraham. Abraham had his most amazing beliefs with regard to the future.

He was absolutely certain that he would have a son. Even though he was far too old for such an eventuality.

And he was sure that he would have a seed. Descendants more numerous than the graves of sand on the seashore.

Though he had no child at all, even in his old age. And he was sure that that seed would inherit the earth. He was sure that through that seed, all the nations of the earth, the whole world, would be blessed.

[27 : 22] Through the children he didn't have. Even at that great advanced age. And yet he was sure about all those astonishing things.

And he was sure too that one day he'd inherited the land of Canaan. God had told him. And on the strength of God's word, he turned his back on his father's house and his family, on his own land, on a whole civilization.

And off he went into the unknown and the uncertain. Because God had made him a promise. And he was sure that God would fulfill that promise.

He wasn't only sure, you see, but he acted upon the certainty. That's the great thing about these men. Noah was sure.

And so he acted and he built his ark. Abraham was sure. And so he acted. And off he went into the unknown.

[28 : 43] Always, the certainty must breed action. We can't be sure about God. And sure about the future, with its great promises and its solemn threats.

We can't be sure about those things and do nothing. We must, like Noah, like Abraham, leave and walk into God's future.

They were absolutely sure. And so they acted. And if we're sure, if we know about God and about God's future, then we're not only luxuriating in that certainty, but we act upon that certainty.

We do something. How can we know that God is there, the living God? How can we know that he is there and simply hold that as some kind of inert, unproductive, intellectual conviction?

It requires decision and action. And so these men were sure of the future. And we Christians, we are sure about the future as well.

[30 : 04] It's not that there are great scientific pointers to the imminent fulfillment of God's great promises, but there is God's own word.

And because of that word, our faith is sure. We are sure, for example, that one day, Jesus Christ is going to return to this world.

We're not sure because there are signs in the sky or signs in the rocks or signs in the temperature of the ocean, but we're sure because God has said it, that one day Christ is going to return.

And we're sure that on that day the graves will open and the dead will rise. We're sure about that.

We're not sure because in the moment of burial, those bodies of our beloved dead show any potential for resurrection.

[31 : 17] we're not sure of the imminence of that day because of any particular signs in the world around us.

But we know that for the God who spoke the universe into being, who spoke space in its incontourable vastness into being and charged that space in its every particle electromagnetic energy, that for that God it is no great thing and no big deal to speak the dead body back into life. It is no more difficult than it was for God to give Abraham and Sarah the child, Isaac out of nothing. Faith is sure that our dead will rise. Faith is sure of reunion with those who we have known in the Lord.

And faith is sure that in that same moment this earth and the whole cosmos is going to undergo a radical transformation, is going to be renewed, and there's going to be a regeneration of heaven and of earth.

[33 : 00] Faith is sure that this current universe is going to be literally dissolved or loosed, pulled apart by the power that once put it together.

And faith is sure not again because there are scientific evidences of this, indeed quite the contrary. All the evidence is, as you bright people, know that this world is an entropy.

and all the signs are that the tendency of the cosmos is not towards greater order but towards greater disorder, the collapse of systems, the loss of energy, the loss of temperature, the loss of life, the loss of law and order.

the signs can tell us that yes, one day that great sun in the sky, that great nuclear explosion that we call the sun, it's going to burn out.

It won't happen tomorrow, the day after, but it is a computable fact that that energy is not going to last forever.

[34 : 24] It's a marvellous thing the way God runs this world, you see that. It is the collapse of the sun into entropy and chaos that gives us the energy in this world, in this earth, what the sun loses, we gain.

But the point will come when the great battery of the solar system has run down, it's flat, there's nothing left for photosynthesis or whatever, that's the way things are going.

And scientific realism would say that this universe has a very, very sad future, it's all going to end back where it began, without light, without order, without life, that is the physical tendency of things.

But faith is sure that God has an opposite intention and that just when we think entropy and collapse and chaos are inevitable, then God will say let there be a new heaven and a new earth, a great palingenesis, a great regeneration, faith is sure of a new cosmos, faith is certain about it and faith is sure too about this, that one day God will hold a greater size, that one day God will call may may may the great and the small to the bar of his own judgment. God will arrange every human being and their God will pronounce his verdict and their God will pronounce his own sentence.

None of us you know that day can say to him, oh Lord, if only you had told us that you existed, if only you had told us that you made this world, if only you had told us that if we sought you we could find you. I'm not sure what surprises this day that that day may produce.

[37 : 08] It may very well be that some of those may have in mind as I articulate a solemn warning that you are already right with God because God is much more present to judge them than we are.

God comes out into my business. It is the event you see faith assure that on this day when Christ comes and on this day when God raises the dead and on this day when God creates a new universe and on this day God will hold court and God will pronounce his own verdict on every human life.

God is much more present to God. But faith is sure about this too. It's sure that God works all things for good to those who love. And in many ways that's the most important certainty faith has. We know, says Paul, that in all things God works for good.

To those who love. I'm not sure whether for you today that's important but I'm sure of this. That there will be days when it will be important to be sure that this too is subsumed under God's great plan.

And that this too God is able to integrate into his own pattern. To conform us to the image of his own son. In the last analysis that is the meaning of the love that will never let us go. That love is determined.

[39 : 26] That love is determined. Both to make us Christ-like and to bring us where Christ is. And the thought may seem to us that the tendency and aspect of many details in our lives is to tell us that God couldn't, that God doesn't care about us.

And that God doesn't love us. Although things happen which in themselves are inexplicable.

Although things happen that take us to the limits of our own endurance.

Although things happen which frankly in themselves do us no good at all. That is the most solemn thing, you know.

That there are things in God's plan which in themselves do us no good. Which in themselves might embitter us. Which in themselves might ensnare and tempt us.

But it is not you see in themselves that they are to be weighed and measured. That God works them together.

[40 : 52] So that even the mistakes and the lapses and the errors of judgment. The things said and done which ought not to have been said and done.

And the things felt which ought not to have been felt. And it is out of feeling that so much of what we do wrong actually comes.

And yet in the great wisdom of God. What breaks our hearts. And what defies our understanding.

And what takes us beyond our resources. And what does us no good at all. Faith is sure that God works all of these things together for good.

It may be that some, one or two here this morning, are of the view that never again will they smile.

